

**CONCERNING THE MEETING
FOR THE BUILDING UP
OF NEW BELIEVERS**

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(A Talk with Co-workers on July 12, 1950)

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BUILDING UP
OF NEW BELIEVERS**

One

At the very beginning of his Christian life, every new believer should be taught emphatically to have no trust in himself. Suppose a brother is saved at the age of forty. For the past forty years, he has lived in the world, squandered his days in sin, followed the customs of this age, and been bound by Satan. For the past forty years, he has lived according to his own temperament and walked according to his own concepts, feelings, and ideas. Now that he is saved, he absolutely should not have any further trust in himself. He should have a strong distrust of himself.

Christians have standards. There are standards for the Christian life, Christian ideals, and Christian ideas. Those who do not know these standards do not know the meaning of being perfected. They arrogantly boast about themselves and are prone to be satisfied and confident in themselves. Those who do not know these standards take wrong to be right and right to be wrong. Only those who have learned the lessons and who know these standards can tell others what they should not do and what they should not say. Only they can differentiate between right and wrong. The building up of a new believer consists of teaching such a one the standards of the Christian life so that he can walk accordingly.

Two

The first thing a new believer needs is a total and thorough breaking down of this past. Why did the Lord say, "Unless you turn and become like little children, you shall by no means enter into the kingdom of the heavens" (Matt. 18:3)? This means that our past living was wrong. We lived in vanity, and our former days count for nothing! We all should have to have a fresh start. The regeneration that is spoken of in John 3 shows us the need of a new life, while the turning and becoming like little children that is spoken of in Matthew 18 shows us the need of the nullification of our past walk. Everything of the past needs to be torn down and removed. The perfection of a new believer consists of the tearing down of his past item by item. If a man is saved at the age of forty, perfecting means a total destruction of everything that he has acquired during his previous forty years. Many people regret their sins but not themselves. We pass from death into life. We are not putting life into death. The building up of a new believer consists of identifying the things to be dealt with, the things to be eliminated, and the things to be added. Everything should be judged by the biblical standard. If something does not pass this test, if a person's walk is still based on past experiences, past habits, or past concepts, he is living in gross error. As soon as a man believes in the Lord, he has to drop every one of his past concepts. Regeneration gives man a new life, whereas turning to become like little children breaks down his past life. On the negative side, the building up of a new believer consists of tearing down everything that he had in the past. On the positive side, it consists of a fresh start for a new living.

If a new believer does not break down everything that he had in the past, he will experience much frustration in his Christian walk. The things he did in the past will continue to haunt him, and what he receives from the Lord will become a mere addition to what he already has from the past. The result will be a mixture of the Lord's life and his past life. He may still consider himself highly, telling others of his sincerity and patience and of his many sufferings. He may be full of pride yet act in a humble way. He may be greedy for vainglory and earthly treasures, yet think that he is above worldly pursuits and base gain. Many sisters have peculiar temperaments; it is hard for them to get along with others. Many parents have strange ideas about their children. They can go on this way as Christians for ten or twenty years. This is why a new believer should have a strong distrust of himself from the very beginning. He should put a big question mark on everything of his past. From this point forward, he has to drop his old concepts, tear down his old ways, remove his old ideas, and get rid of everything that is old. He has to turn and become like a little child and start his life all over again.

Three

Baptism means the burial of everything of the past. Suppose that a person who is fifty years old is saved and about to be baptized. The meaning of baptism for him is not just that the Lord buries his life but, more specifically, that the Lord takes away every one of the fifty years of his former life. Sin has permeated his total constitution. He is sick in every respect. Therefore, everything has to go under the water. Then he has to rise from the grave. He also has to get away from the clothes that he wore while he was in the grave. The act of baptism should not stop short of something as serious as this.

Four

As soon as a man is saved, he should have a fundamental change in his concept of values. Every past concept concerning values no longer counts; they were all wrong. Perfecting a new believer means showing him the errors and mistakes of his past concept of values. A man has to see something new; he has to have a new concept of values. What was precious to him is now refuse. What was profitable to him is now loss. He can no longer have the same temperament and use the same vocabulary, and his clothing and food can no longer be the same. He can no longer hold the same view regarding marriage and sex. He needs new views and new concepts about parenthood and friendship. He should be different in his choices of amusements and careers. Everything is new, and he will need a fresh start.

Five

If we train a new believer lesson by lesson and if he tears down what should be torn down and builds up what needs to be built up, he will come closer and closer to the standard of a normal Christian.

A FEW THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR DURING THE TRAINING SESSIONS

In order to strengthen the meeting for the building up of new believers, we must first train the brothers and sisters and then assign them to take care of the new ones. Hopefully, no new believer would skip this process. Those who are trained to take care of the new believers should note the following:

(1) Do not put all your trust in your speaking. Encourage asking. First Corinthians 14:35 speaks of asking. This means that the early churches gave the saints much freedom to ask questions. A meeting that affords no opportunity for asking is surely an overly formal one. The leaders have to encourage the audience to ask questions and to talk about the things that they do not understand.

(2) In answering questions, do not save your face at the expense of the truth. If you know the answer, say that you know it. If you do not know the answer, say that you do not know it.

(3) Every leading one should ask himself whether he is representing himself or the truth. Everyone should represent the truth. No one should represent his own feelings or temperament. He must uphold the truth rather than his own feelings. No one should express his own opinions. For example, in the matter of head covering, a leading one may not understand everything about this truth. He cannot, therefore, tell others that this is optional. God's truth is absolute, and we have to speak the same thing. If our trumpets give uncertain sounds, we will fight uncertain battles. Even if a person has some disagreement, he should only express himself through constructive suggestions, not destructive criticisms.

(4) Every leading one should realize from the first day that his place is only that of a channel; he is here to communicate God's word; he is not the master or the teacher. He should be like a man in a low place communicating to another man in a low place. He should not be like a man in a high place teaching another man in a low place. No one can assume the place of a teacher. Everyone has to take the place of a messenger.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Since the building up of new believers is a basic training, I hope that all the local churches will have such a meeting—the new believers' building-up meeting. Let me now cover some practical considerations.

Who a New Believer Is

As soon as a sinner has believed in the Lord and is baptized, he is a new believer. Starting from the week that he is baptized, he should attend the new believers meeting. After a year, he will have heard most of the things that he should hear and should have learned most of the things that he should learn. Then we can say that such a Christian has gone through the basic training. From that point on, we can expect him to receive further, deeper building up.

As soon as a sinner believes, he needs to attend the new believers meeting no matter how old he is, how educated he is, how high a position he occupies, or how experienced he is in the world. If his past is not torn down, it will be difficult for him to live a proper Christian life. Therefore, as soon as a person believes and is baptized, irrespective of who he is, we have to treat him as a new believer and invite him to the new believers meeting.

Those who have never gone through this kind of basic training, even though they have been believers for many years, can also attend the new believers meetings if they so desire. The purpose of these meetings is to tear down the old and build up the new. It is not a question of how many years a person has believed in the Lord but of how much of his past has been torn down since becoming a believer. I know a brother who has never confessed his sins to anyone in his whole life. Yet he is now a responsible brother! It does not matter how many years he has been a Christian. As far as his spiritual experience is concerned, he needs a fresh start and should join the new believers meeting.

Days for the New Believers Meeting

In making arrangements for the new believers meeting, all the churches should try their best to set aside Wednesday or Thursday. Whether this meeting involves many people or few people, the whole congregation or small classes, it should be on Wednesday or Thursday. This should be done week after week. Whenever a new believer goes to another place that has a church, he should be able to join in immediately and not miss any lessons.

Training Meetings

Periodic Intensified Trainings

These short-term trainings are conducted by one brother (possibly one of the co-workers) when he gathers together all the brothers in a district or region who are capable of ministering the word. Every short-term training should cover at least ten to twenty lessons. By conducting three or four such trainings, all of the subjects will be covered. When these brothers return to their respective localities, they can bear the responsibility of teaching in the local new believers meeting.

Weekly Local Trainings

A place such as Shanghai has many new believers. If we divide them into several dozen classes, we would need over a hundred leading ones. In order to take care of this, we can ask one brother to head up the matter by gathering the leading ones every week to train them. On the one hand, they can discuss the problems and the mistakes of the past week. On the other hand, they can study the topics for the following week. The best time to do this is Friday. If Friday is not available, it should be done no later than Monday. This will give them at least three to seven days to prepare their lessons, and they will not lose focus of the main points of the messages.

Lesson Books and Notebooks

During the training sessions, if a new learner does not have a copy of the book, he will have to take notes. If he has the book, he must read the lesson carefully. If he comes across anything that he does not understand, he should ask, and everyone should discuss it together. They should consider what the main subject of the lesson is, how many sections it has, what the main points in each section are, and what the crucial words and important teachings in each section are. They should identify the things that need to be torn down and what needs to be built up. They should study the lesson section by section and ask questions while they listen. Then they should go to their respective classes the following Thursday to conduct their own meetings.

Achieving the Objectives

In delivering a lesson, the main goal is not to help the new believers understand more teachings but to do some carving work on them. One should pay attention to the areas that require carving; he should know what needs to be torn down and what needs to be added. These lessons should serve as tools to build up the believers and to make new persons out of them. Of course, in order to achieve the desired objective, the leading ones first must be dealt with in the area they are speaking about. Otherwise, their speaking will not be genuine. They will only speak vain words, and these words will be powerless. Everyone who is responsible for the new believers meeting should pay attention to this matter.

Dividing Up the Classes

If a church has very few new believers or if there are not enough speakers, there is no need to divide the new believers into classes. In such cases one person should simply bear the responsibility of teaching these lessons, followed by questions, week after week. But if a church has many new believers, these believers should be divided into smaller classes and should be trained separately. Division of classes can be according to geography or level of understanding. Adjust according to the local practical need. If there is an adequate number of leaders, the classes can range from a few persons to perhaps a dozen or so. In dividing up the classes, one should pay attention to the following points:

Paying Attention to the Students

Suppose one class has a relatively high standard of literacy. We should arrange to have stronger ones teach such a class. If another class consists of those with a lower standard of literacy, the leading one in the class should be experienced in teaching the truth in a simple way. Once we have the right kind of students for the right teachers, the leading ones will not find it difficult to teach, and the audience will be built up.

When Not Using the Textbook

In some places only the leaders have the book. In this case everyone in the audience should carry a notebook and write down the crucial points and the subject of every portion. In some classes the new believers may be illiterate or semi-literate. In such circumstances there is no need to pass out the book. The leading one should pick out at least one crucial verse and read it to the audience again and again. He should also ask them to repeat it after him. Then he should explain the main points of the lesson to them. He should ask them if they understand the lesson and give them the opportunity to ask questions.

When Using the Textbook

In places where the textbook is used, everyone should be given a copy during the meeting. The leader should help the new believers read the lesson together or take turns reading it section by section. The leading one should ask questions as he moves along, and the listeners should also feel free to ask questions as they listen. Sometimes the listeners can be asked to say something, but their speaking has to be brief and should not occupy too much time. This will make the meeting more lively. Try your best to avoid lectures or sermons. Those who can take notes should prepare a notebook and write down the important points throughout the course of the lesson.

Time

Every meeting should be limited to one and a half hours. The meeting should not drag on.

Things to Pay Attention to in Speaking, Asking, and Answering

Speaking

Our voices should be loud enough for the whole class to hear. Do not stray off the subject. Examples or stories must fit the subject. It is best to speak the main points in a clear way according to the text of the lesson. Do not take advantage of the occasion to speak what you want to speak. Do not go off on a tangent. Do not sermonize, but mix your speaking with questions.

Asking

Questions should be pertinent and limited to the subject of the lesson. Do not stray into unrelated subjects. For example, in speaking about "Salvation through Faith and Baptism" in the lesson on baptism, we only should ask what this aspect of salvation refers to. Do not jump from the salvation spoken of in this lesson to the salvation of the soul, and then from the salvation of the soul to the matter of the kingdom, and then from the kingdom to the difference between entering into the kingdom and going to heaven. If the scope is too broad and the questions stray too far from the subject, the original subject will be lost, and the discussion will become unfruitful.

Answering

Answers must be clear. If the questions are off the subject, you can answer by saying that it is a priority to know the lesson itself and that other questions can be saved until later. For example, if someone raises a question about salvation by grace or about the salvation of the soul during the lesson on baptism, just answer by saying that there are several aspects to salvation and that in this particular portion we are only concerned about the meaning of salvation.

Paying Attention to Whether or Not the Lesson Has Been Put into Practice

Do not worry about repeating the message. A man can hear a message this year and forget about it the next year, and when you check with him the third year, he still may not have put the lesson into practice. Our purpose is not just to speak something to the new believers but to check whether or not they are practicing what they have heard. We should not speak something and then forget about it. Instead, we should ask whether or not they are doing what they have heard. For example, we may speak about rising early. We must check with them to see if they are rising early. If we speak about reading the Bible, we have to check with them to see if they are reading the Bible. When we speak on prayer, we have to check with them to see if they are praying. We have to keep pushing and checking with them, until they begin to practice and deal with these things conscientiously.

Make-up Lessons

The leading ones have to find out how much time they should spend on a lesson and how long they should continue with it. However, I hope that the difference in pace will not be too great. If some have missed something or are too much behind, we should arrange for make-up lessons. In conducting the make-up lessons, we have to be serious about it. We have to be thorough in making up what we ourselves have missed. If we are not serious about it, we will not have anything to impart to others.

HAVING A FRESH SPIRIT

These lessons should be taught year after year. They should be taught continuously. Hence, the speakers must learn to be fresh in their spirit. The truths will be the same ten years from now, but the spirit cannot be the same. If the leading ones have learned to exercise their spirit and if their spirit is fresh, they can repeat a lesson again and again for ten or twenty years. If others are to be touched by your word, this word first must touch your own spirit. You must have a fresh touch of the spirit. If your spirit is old and you pass on only teachings, others will only receive help in doctrine. The doctrine will become something like the "Common Prayer," which men recite in services week after week. But if you touch the word with your spirit, repetition will not become a problem.

THE NEED FOR THE LORD'S BLESSING

The Christian life is a life that hinges on the Lord's blessing. If the Lord's blessing is with us, we will not be off the mark by too much even when the practical arrangements are not altogether desirable. But if the Lord's blessing is not with us, we will not have good results even if all the arrangements are perfect. In some cases the Lord still grants His blessing even when circumstances are not all that ideal. In other cases the Lord's blessing may be held back because of just a slight mistake. A Christian should not be after the achievement of outward correctness, but the way of divine blessing.